WILSHIRE'S

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Logan Wilshire and His Poems

WHILE the education of youth must largely be a matter of contact with the actual facts of the day rather than with the reading of books on the past and therefore it is really a matter more or less beyond the power of control of parents, nevertheless to a certain extent some influence, even though it be but a negative one, may be exercised. If we can only prevent our children from having their brains stunted by too close a contact with unthinking minds and give them a chance for a free and untrammeled development we will have done much. Of course even this is difficult for ordinarily the child from infancy is almost bound to be more or less associated with conventional blockheads and then finally to have his native originality crushed out of him by modern methods of education. For most parents financial conditions usually allow but one channel for the education of the child, the public school. There is no other choice. On the other hand while the well to do parents may have the means to give their children a free environment they usually fail to see its importance, with the result that if anything the mind of the child of the rich is often even more stunted than the child of poor.

It is not what a child knows which counts, but what it thinks. There is a vast difference between the two. When it comes to real thinking the average farm hand often has a better mind than the ordinary college professor. It is nothing to have knowledge, the main thing is to know how to use your knowledge. A savage with a bow and arrow that he can use is a better soldier than a civilized man with a machine gun that he does not understand and can't use.

I take it that the main thing in the education of a child is to give its mind a chance to expand in a favorable environment. Treat the child as you would a rose bush. If the plant is of the right stock and has good soil and sufficient water and if the ground is well cultivated and if it is not interfered with by other plans or by noxious insects the chances are it will bear good roses. If it doesn't then you can do nothing more for it. You can't scent it with an artificial odor nor dye its petals.

You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear, but on the other hand you can make a pretty good imitation of a sow's ear out of a silk purse if you mix in enough mud. However, with all one's theories about education, results are very uncertain. We are much more certain of what is the wrong way to bring up a child than we are of the right way.

My own child, a boy of eight, is a good instance of how a child may develop who has been totally neglected as to conventional education. He neither reads nor writes, hardly knows his letters, and yet I think those who know him personally will say that in the matter of conversation he is much more intelligent than most boys who have had the conventional schooling. And certainly his literary product, a few samples of which I will give later on, indicates a very high degree of originality. It is impossible, absurd in fact, to say that it is all due to the freedom of his early environment that he has his poetic conceptions. But it is certain that if he had had a conventional training these would have been crushed out of him. One superlative advantage he has had from birth has been the close care of a loving, intelligent mother; he has never had a nurse. For a child he has traveled a great deal. When a year old he was taken in an automobile from New York to Maine. The next year or so he was taken with us to the Bishop Creek Mine at the top of the Sierras in California and then later on he went down with us to South America and had a long trip up the tropical rivers and over dangerous waterfalls much like those which Roosevelt has recently so glamoured with terrors. We made it a point that he should make friends and play with the Indian children. Since then he has had the advantage of spending a summer in Italy and France and visiting the art galleries. He is now living with his mother in England on Hampstead Heath and I hope both will soon be with me in California. I go into these more or less tedious details for they will be of interest to those making a study of child psychology. His first introduction to the reading public occurred through the publication in the Poetry Review edited by Stephen Phillips of last April of the following article by Mr. G. C. Ashton Jonson:

THE "BEAUTIFUL WORDS" OF LOGAN WILSHIRE

PROVERBIAL wisdom teaches us that poets are born not made. This truthful saying comes to one's mind with new meaning, when one reads what little Logan Wilshire, a boy of seven years old,

calls his "Beautiful Words," words dictated to, and taken down by his mother with the most scrupulous exactitude, when he was between the ages of five and seven—words that take the form of prose poems, that are, except for the absence of form and metre, poetry of a high order. The problems of child psychology opened up by the writings of this little boy are so numerous, that they might well form the subject of discussion in a long volume by one or more experts, and these few words in no way pretend to deal adequately with the subject, but are intended only to serve as an introduction to the readers of The *Poetry Review* of work which is of enthralling interest from many points of view. The ideas, thoughts and innate knowledge displayed in Logan Wilshire's work are as much beyond the ordinary mental capacity of a child as were the achievements of Mozart, in composing and playing fugues at the age of four. Logan says things which carry our minds back to Wordsworth's famous ode:

"Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The soul that rises with us, our life's star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting
And cometh from afar,
Not in entire forgetfulness
And not in utter nakedness
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God who is our home:
Heaven lies about us in our infancy."

I have seen a record of what Logan said early one morning to his mother, but it would be almost sacrilege to print so wonderful and intimate a communication. The child has never been told of the theory of re-incarnation, and had never heard any conversation on such lines, and yet he said, "And this form I have now is seventeen hundred years old." He speaks of "My Real Self, my Soul," not "My Spirit."

He has, in accordance with modern theories of education, not yet been taught to read or write. His prose poems are dictated to his mother when the inspiration comes to him. "Mother," he will exclaim, "I want to say beautiful words to you," and then with his eyes looking into the far away, in a level measured tone, he will dictate such a prose poem as

THE CRYSTAL

"The Crystal lay between Heaven and Earth, and the rainbow filled it with light. Then the Sun and the Moon and the Stars and the Universes one by one made it gifts of their substances.

So the Crystal had the glow of the ruby and the glitter of the diamond, and all colors and powers, and with wings of gold it roamed through the sky.

When the Mortals on Earth saw it, they covered their eyes from its dazzling light. They felt faint and staggered. But the Crystal said, 'You shall be able to see my light and you shall be able to see my glory.'

So the Crystal went down to earth and lived with Mortals and by taking a peep now and then, the Mortals got so they could look at the Crystal and see the glory, and that was how the World was made good.

The crystal has always had a great attraction for Mystics. Peter Sterry, fellow of Emanuel College, Cambridge, and Chaplain to Oliver Cromwell, published in 1683, "The Rise, Race and Royalty of the Kingdom of God in the Soul of Man," in which he speaks of the Adamah, or dust of the ground, out of which Adam was created. "It signifieth in its root a sparkling lutre and ruddiness like that of the best Rubies, a sweet and glorious light shining through a dark shade like a rosy morning—The Light of the Godhead sparkling in a Shadow of Himself—Thus man is a living Crystal in which the entire form of all the world, visible and invisible, is seen transparently in the whole Glass."

We all know how children love to invent marvelous romances and adventures, but the child must be a poet who can have "a Journey" like Logan Wilshire's.

"Once, as I was journeying in my winged chariot, I saw a great Crystal. I thought what a beautiful gift it would make for a friend, so I waved my magic wand and turned it into a crystal palace. Then the dragon that guarded the crystal came out and objected, so I gave him another crystal. With my fairy bow and arrow and quiver I rode through the air on beautiful bird tracks." [Isn't that delicious! What other roads are there in the air but "beautiful bird tracks."] "I roamed the high mountains where there was sweet fruit, calm air and calm delights. So on I went to good fairy-land. Oh how beautiful it was! But as I looked, I saw the bad fairies were warring with the good ones. Then I began sending love darts which struck the bad fairies, and love gushed into them and the darts came back into my quiver. But one bad fairy threw a javelin into my side. I pulled it out, it hurt like a gad-fly. Then I went up in my winged chariot beyond range of the javelins and with the spring of the light of my heart made violent dashes with my love darts dipped in treacle and made the bad fairies good. When I saw that, I drank shells of nectar." [Out of what else can one drink nectar but shells! and doesn't the childlike love of treacle flutter deliciously across the beautiful poetry of the ideas and description.]

A word about the personality of the author of these "Beautiful Words."

There is nothing abnormal or priggish about him: he is just a dear beautiful little human boy, with a genius for dancing, and a spontaneous gift of graceful gesture and a wonderful turn for mechanics. His favorite toys are models of aeroplanes, and modern engineering terms occur even in his prose poems, as when he visited Olympus and found Jove trying "to crank up his thunderbolt machine." That he is a genius there can be no doubt, but in what direction his genius will develop it is too early to say. Will Will the "clouds of glory" be dissipated? Will he be a great writer or poet or an inventor? [Already stabilizing devices for aeroplanes absorb a good deal of his thoughts.]

Evidently he has a definite conception of genius. Genius is to him sometimes a Goddess, sometimes a God, as in this lovely prose poem called:

A DREAM

"The God of Dreams came to me last night and I had a dream of the World when the World was a child. And in this Child World there were two Gods; the God of Nature and the God Genius.

"The God of Nature provided all the materials, and the God Genius took them and made them into wonderful things.

"Nature gave Genius a pair of leaves and Genius made them into wings—wings for the birds, wings for the butterflies, wings for all the things that fly. Such a beautiful dream! Such a wonderful World! the World when it was a Child."

The child has a penetrating sense of beauty. He was taken recently to an artist's studio and on returning wrote the artist a letter.

"But you—when you get a good picture ready, must be glad and say to yourself, 'It is a good thing to be an artist.' Besides, I think you could do anything in the love of beauty. And to get your work in love and beauty is the only thing the artist wants. I never had a feeling to learn artistry before, but now! At my first beautiful glimpse of your studio my heart filled with delight. How beautiful the studio, how beautiful the paintings, the palette and the tubes of paint like jewels. People who hate the arts are people who do not know the wisdom of the world. I think famous artists ought to have thrones of gold and castles in the sea."

A book of tales from the Grecian mythology had been read to him, and immediately, like another Keats, the child's imagination drank of the classic "fountain of immortal drink, pouring unto us from the heaven's brink." His childish fancy plays deliciously with Jove, Mars, Vulcan, Cupid, Venus, and Minerva and all the hierarchy of Olympus, but with what exquisite insight does he gauge the uselessness of wisdom without love, in

A MESSAGE TO JOVE

"First I saw Minerva on her throne, and I told her that in Fairy-land there was a Judge that was wiser than she. She asked me how that could be, because for ages and ages she had got wisdom, and no one had so much. But I said, 'He is wiser in Love, and his heart is bigger.'

"Then I saw Minerva as a low beast in a cavern, and I said, 'Why have you taken this form?' And she said, 'Because I cannot die, which I would do if I were not immortal. I will be a low beast if I cannot be the Goddess of Wisdom.'

"'Now Minerva,' I said, 'don't be discouraged. Take your courage and come

with me. I am the God of Plans and I have a plan for you.' So I went and she followed me to the Crystal Island where there were many caves. I took her to one cave full of hearts, and I fitted heart after heart over hers until her heart was bigger than the Fairy Judge's. Then I took her to a cave in which there was a great Crystal Ball which would give her the magic of using her love with her wisdom. That made her wiser than the Judge. Then we went back to Mount Olympus with Minerva in her own form and we placed the Crystal in front of her throne.

"And, Jove, it is a beautiful Crystal, and if you go out to see Minerva you will find it as I have said. And, Jove, my greatest regards to you and I hope you will get over your ways, because I want to invite you to my Castle when you have stopped your rumbling and thunder and lightning."

Here is a description of a dance which would make a lovely episode in a ballet. ("A little cruelty from Mars, but only towards fully armed people!" No need to tell this child of the folly and cruelty and false glory of war.)

A DANCE

"I will tell you a dance of a little child who collects gifts from the Gods before he goes to live on Earth.

"The little child comes from Mars, who gives him a little cruelty, not cruelty towards animals, because they have no spears, but only towards fully armed people.

"He then goes to Cupid, who gives him love, and to Venus, who gives him a certain amount of beauty. Then to Bacchus, who gives him the joy of life, and dancing, and taste.

"Then to Minerva, who gives him of her wisdom, and last of all he goes to Genius, the highest God of all, who gives him Wisdom out of everything, which is feeling or soul, and who taught him such things as the dragons underneath the earth raving about the great men who have died."

There is delicious humor, also in Logan Wilshire's fancy, mixed with beautiful ideas as in

MAGIC

"Wouldn't it be wonderful if we had such magic that cartridges wouldn't explode, that swords wouldn't draw out of their scabbards, that cannons wouldn't let the balls go out and soldiers couldn't pull triggers?

"Then the little bullets would run around and titter, the swords would jig and smile and smile, the cannon balls would dance and laugh, the uniforms would run out of the tents, so the soldiers couldn't get them, the tents would fall down, and out of the sky would come a streak of lightning and smoke would come over.

"Then the clouds would open, showing the King of the Fairies, and his good Fairies rushing down to earth, with a message to the soldiers not to kill each other any more.

" 'I will change you into good fairies,' the King would say, 'so there will never be any more killing on earth, and you will learn how to save people's lives instead of taking them. I will change all your weapons into love. That will be wise and sensible.'

" 'All right,' the soldiers would say."

In "A letter to Cupid," he says in a delightfully chatty strain, "I can't say that Mars is what you would call a good man. I like him in a way, but he's not fine in a nice way. He is good to give you powerful darts which you can soon get the poison out and use for love."

In another prose poem we read, "All the Gods were excited when they heard about me getting the better of Mars. Jove sent me a letter on sheets of silver with the message made of every kind of precious stone. The sheets had gold rimmings and were changeable colors and were fastened together by a huge diamond and ruby. Among all the gifts from the different Gods was one from Diana who sent me a bone of Hercules shaped like a cup from which I could drink strength and goodness and health, and from Bacchus a golden case filled with little pots of wine that had no drunkenness in it."

There is one tale of Perseus and the Water Dragon in which we read that "Perseus stood on his rock very quiet and thoughtful, looking at the sea. He was very solemn, because he had no ladies to rescue."

In another called "The Rock Dragon," "Perseus was sitting on his rock smoking his pipe and talking to a gentleman who was a Knight. Presently he heard a shriek, and said, 'That sounds like a rock dragon, I hope it won't take my wife.' "

Recently the child seems to be striving towards a more definite poetical form as in this couplet.

THE SUNSET

The Sun it says good-bye to its little baby planets,
And then it softly lullabyes itself into soft clouds.

Or this blank verse poem on:

THE SOLDIER

"Ah! every soldier has his courage,
And his courage is his dauntless heart
Although he marches over ground of life
Death has got its claws on him.
Then to their beloved ones the few come back
And nevermore they roam away to army
And Death he dies for want of death."

The last line has a ring of Shakespeare about it, "And Death once dead, there's no more dying then."

One delightful little story about an imaginary elemental that he calls a "Regentspank" reads curiously as if it had really occurred, just as he tells it.

THE REGENTSPANK

"I saw a Regentspank when I was a little baby. It was once when you left me alone in my crib: you sometimes did leave me alone didn't you? and he flew right over my crib and said 'What are you?' and I said, 'I, Why I am a BABY,' and he said 'What is a BABY,' and I just looked at him, thinking he would know that I was one. 'What is a BABY,' he pleaded again. Then I said, 'I AM A BABY' "just like that), and then he knew. And that was the way he learned the word."

And Logan Wilshire has that touch of divine love and compassion that is the inheritance of all great poets.

Once when he had been saying something extraordinarily deep to a lady, she asked him: "When did you ever hear such things? have you ever heard your mother talk of them?" "No," said the child, "I just know them. I know them here." He laid his hand upon his breast. " I know everything here," he repeated. "That is why I am so sad sometimes, when I think of the little children who suffer, who burn up or get drowned."

The development of such a child will be of extraordinary interest to all lovers of poetry, since his work, apart from its psychological interest, has an intrinsic poetic value and inherent charm.

The publication of Mr. Jonson's aroused a surprising amount of interest. Not only did the British papers give copious extracts from his "poetry," but on the continent papers of all tongues, Hungarian, German, French, and Italian gave extended accounts. Mrs. Mollie Price-Cook, director of the largest and best known Montesorri school in Los Angeles, also had a very appreciative article in *The Dawn* of Santa Barbara. She says "surely our vision must be quickened when contemplating the beautiful thoughts and compositions of Logan Wilshire." I quote from her:

"One day Logan and his mother were discussing the hatching of the chicken from the egg. Of his own accord he broached the question of the cat and kittens. He was much impressed with the beauty of the kittens' birth.

"Isn't it beautiful," he said, "that the mother cat gives up her blood and her flesh for her little ones? Of course she loves them." Then, suddenly turning, he exclaimed: "Why, mother, I must have come out of you!" (He was overwhelmed with the beauty of her giving up her life to him.) "Don't you remember, mother, when I was lying within you? You must remember! I remember! I remember feeling your heart beat! And then don't you remember, mother, when I moved? You must have loved me then! It was when I first became conscious and knew that I was to emerge into the great world and become part of it—and I danced for joy! Oh mother, you must have loved me! You must remember that."

This curious, penetrating, near-mystic delving into the depths of life must make us feel the latent possibiiities within the human brain and soul."

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fers to what it quotes from him as "beautiful and naive prose-poems."

We have often been asked what is our future program for Logan. We have but one idea and that is to do all we can to allow him a free development, free from superstitions of all kinds, free from intellectual coercion. At present we are simply sending him to a school where he is taught nothing but Russian ballet dancing. We feel that the right way to educate a child's mind is through his body rather than through his brain and that the rythmic control of the body which a child gets through Russian dancing affords an ideal way of carrying out our theories.

Especially will he never be taught "morality"; no more need of that for a child than to teach his heart to beat.

THE LABOR MOVEMENT IN LOS ANGELES

WHAT is interesting in the development of the Labor Movement in Los Angeles is its evolution, so to speak, from a deductive philosophy to an inductive one. Something over twenty-five years ago when I entered into what we then called the Labor Movement in Los Angeles, it was really not a labor movement at all but merely a collection of more or less inspired cranks all having new and various plans for the redemption of mankind largely based upon what we would do when we got the Referendum and the Initiative, or rather the Imperative Mandate, for that was what we called the Initiative in those prehistoric days.

We started a paper, the California Nationalist, we called a Convention in San Francisco and had a famous split over the academic question whether or no we would ever, under any circumstances, protect property at the expense of human life.

Job Harriman and a strong minority bolted and went off on the side of property and the rest of us stood staunch for human life, although how we were going to sustain life without property, property being defined as the Earth, I never could quite understand. But anyway we voted against Job and so he took up his toys and dusted out of the Convention hall. We thought that split meant the setting back of the Revolution at least 100 years, and may be it did, for it's not in sight yet after twenty-six years. In 1890 I was nominated Socialist candidate for Congress from Los Angeles. If there was another Socialist candidate in the whole of America in that election I did not know it—don't yet, in fact.

I conducted the well-known whirlwind variety of Socialist campaign, would go into a town unannounced and think I had a wonderful meeting if six men and a dog came to the street corner while I expounded the Inevitability of the Trust and the Futility of Anti-Trust laws. Even after twenty-five years my old speeches are very up to date compared with Teddy's. I landed about 1000 votes, all being "scratches," for we had no method then of getting our names printed on the ballot. The day after election I left for England, although I tarried en route long enough in New York to go through a campaign there in 1891 with Daniel DeLeon, he being the Socialist nominee for Governor and I for Attorney General. The ticket polled about 15,000 votes in the whole state.

In 1896 I returned to Los Angeles and in 1900 I was again the Socialist candidate for Congress and polled that time about 3500 votes. After the election I repeated my retreat to London via New York, but this time it took me fourteen years to finish my round trip back to California. What strikes me now in Los Angeles is the much closer contact there is between theory and practice than in the old day. It used to be all theory and now it seems to be tending to all practice.

We used to discuss Marx and Bellamy, now we cheer MacNamara and Ford and Suhr. Then we took up collections for the dissemination of literature, while at the meeting I attended last week in Los Angeles a collection was taken up to send fifty I. W. W. men to Wheatland to organize the hop-pickers, to disseminate men instead of literature as it were. In the old days we decided upon what kind of a Utopia we were going to have and then laid out an ambitious program to use the "power" of the ballot to "capture" the State. We were then to inaugurate Heaven on Earth under the direction of our elected ones whom we were to control by "signed resignations held by the Party."

Nowadays we are setting out to organize labor on industrial lines with a revolutionary aim and let the finality come out in the wash. We have switched from the deductive to the inductive or to the pragmatic, as Walling might say.

Its all interesting and I must say I like the red-blooded men who seem to be the leaders here of the New Movement, but I must confess there seemed more fun in the thing for me personally as a middle-class participant and candidate in the old days than there is now in being merely a rooter on the bleachers. However, it is better to root for what you can get than to vote for what you can't, what?

President Wilson's theory that the trouble with business is merely psychological is pathetic but on the other hand, the theory of the financiers that the trouble lies with Wilson and his anti-trust activity is equally unthinking. Business cannot improve until we can find a market for our goods. The natural channel for distribution to the workers being blocked by low wages, our only hope for "prosperity" lies in stirring up a big war—say between Germany and Austria—which unquestionably would give considerable relief to the non-participating nations.

War is one of the relics of barbarism, but nevertheless it is an absolute necessity for the perpetuation of the Capitalist System.

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